

# Aborigines get a new voice

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From MICHELLE GRATTAN, in Canberra

**B**LACK is beautiful — cool, sophisticated — and politically aware.

These are the themes of the new-look all-Aboriginal magazine *Identity*.

The latest issue of *Identity*, which was launched in 1970, has been just released by its new editor, John Newfong.

Mr. Newfong sprang into national prominence earlier this year as the articulate publicist and spokesman for the "Aboriginal Embassy" opposite Parliament House.

But he has a long record in the Aboriginal rights movement, and is a former general secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

The first Aborigine to become a professional journalist, Mr. Newfong, now 28, has worked for papers here and overseas.

*Identity*, which is supported by a Commonwealth Government grant, is published by the Aboriginal Publications Foundation. From its beginning it has been a high-quality journal, but Mr. Newfong has made it political and produced something resembling an overseas "glossy".

The production reflects the influence of American black publications like *Embassy*, a popular, middle-class, black version of *Life*.

The current issue focuses on "black power". The red and black cover design — taken from one of

Mr. Newfong's own paintings — symbolises black-power ideology. Black circles represents the Afro hairstyle and the red represents blood and violence.

The black militants put their views in a symposium of articles.

Bruce McGuinness issues their challenge to Australian society. "Whitey, it used to be your ballgame. But today, the blacks of Australia have torn up your book of rules, and printed their own. The title of the new book is "Black is beautiful, right on brothers and sisters, and screw you, whitey".

**H**OWEVER, Mr. Newfong sets the predominant political tone, and it is a rather more moderate one.

He argues for Aborigines supporting the Labor Party in this election, because it might be forced to offer marginal benefits for them.

However, he says, where Aborigines are standing (there are three Aboriginal candidates, as well as Senator Neville Bonner, who is up for election because he was appointed to the Senate in mid-term) they should be supported, even where they seem to be doing little for the Aborigines.

"If getting black men into Parliament merely serves to keep more white men out, it is still a worthwhile exercise," Mr. Newfong writes.

"When there are enough black men in Parliament it may be possible to form a voting bloc on matters affecting Aborigines.

"And, if there is ever enough common ground between these

men on other issues too, then a Black Australia Party may become fact rather than fiction."

This issue of *Identity* also devotes special attention to black women.

Lillian Holt looks at black women in Australia... "Not only has she had to endure rape by the system but, more realistically rape by aggressive, uncouth, egotripping, chauvinistic white males".

And there are a series of interviews with four "birds both black and beautiful" who have ties with both black Australia and black America.

Mr. Newfong says the role of *Identity* is to be "impartial and critical yet sympathetic to the black cause".

"Any movement worth its salt has to take criticism from within. And many people won't accept criticism except from other black people."

He sees it as having a special appeal to the rapidly increasing urban Aboriginal population.

But Mr. Newfong's aim is wider. He wants to get the messages of *Identity* across to European Australians, and to people overseas.

In his first editorial, Mr. Newfong declares: "The white Press in America takes its cue in black American affairs from *Ebony* more than any other black publication, and if *Identity* can serve a similar function here, then the Aboriginal advancement movement will be all the stronger for it."



An Aboriginal protest march in Melbourne.

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